

WASHINGTON D.C., Feb. 17, 2011 – Congressmen Michael Honda (D-CA) and Chaka Fattah (D-PA), the leading Congressional advocates for school funding equity, hailed the Department of Education’s appointment today of Commissioners who will launch and serve on the Equity and Excellence Commission. Honda, a former teacher and local school board member who has represented Silicon Valley in California for the past decade, introduced legislation, joined by Fattah, to authorize the Equity Commission. Honda launched the effort to fund the Commission in 2009.

The commission, first proposed and advanced by the two Congressmen in 2009, has been tasked with studying, and recommending solutions to, inequitable school finance systems and their effect on student achievement. The 28 commissioners appointed by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan bring a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives and opinions and represent the full political and educational spectrum. They include the leaders of both major teachers’ unions, business leaders, school district officials, civil rights advocates and former Republican Illinois governor Jim Edgar.

The Equity Commission’s first meeting will be Tuesday, February 22 at the Department of Education in Washington. That will be followed by public meetings, town halls and hearings across the nation to allow commissioners to gather information that inform their recommendations. The commission will report to the Secretary of Education, who will share the report with Congress, in May of 2012.

Congressman Honda declared, “All our children should have an equal opportunity to achieve prosperity, not just those at the top. Closing our achievement gap, however, is not just about those at the bottom. It is about making sure that every working and middle class neighborhood has a world-class school. The Equity Commission represents an important opportunity to reframe the issue of education equity and raise its profile in the national debate.”

“We have known for years that equal opportunity is a fallacy in our public schools. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, which shows the US lagging badly behind most of the developed world in reading, math and science, highlights how equity/inequity in education correlates directly with global competitiveness (or lack thereof),” Honda continued. “As poverty increases in our schools, our scores steadily decrease. This finding should make our goal simple: To make every school as good as the schools in our wealthiest communities.

“The Equity Commission represents an opportunity to address our broken system of education finance and develop a plan for comprehensive school finance reform that is focused on high achievement for all students. I hope parents, teachers, administrators, Congress, the Department of Education and the Obama Administration seize the opportunity to make this a true Sputnik moment for each of our children.”

“This commission comes at a critical time in our fiscal history as a nation. Now, more than ever, we are compelled to use scarce public resources efficiently and effectively,” said Fattah, an

innovator and advocate for education reform who proposed the Commission concept at a meeting with the President on Feb. 26, 2009. “We know that there is no more prudent investment in the nation’s growth and prosperity than the education of our young people.”

Fattah, from Philadelphia, praised the work of Equity Commissioner Eric Hanushek, a Hoover Institution Fellow, who calculated that simply increasing the educational attainment of the nation’s lowest performing students would add \$72 trillion to GDP, as well as a 2009 McKinsey report that found that the achievement gap has the economic effect of a permanent recession. “The proof is there: Educational achievement will key our economic recovery,” Fattah said. “This is more than a question of fairness and equity, this is about the nation’s economic future.”

The Equity Commission is charged with collecting data, analyzing issues and obtaining broad public input on strategies for the federal government to increase educational opportunity by improving school funding equity. It will also make recommendations for restructuring school finance systems to achieve equity in resources and further student performance, especially for students at the lower end of the achievement gap.

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